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MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

FAITH DOES IT AGAIN

Surviving a Difficult Situation

Peaks and Valleys

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In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was known as a master trickster, and the most cunning of men. Eventually, the gods were so displeased with his craftiness and deceitfulness that they condemned him in the afterlife to push a huge boulder up a steep hill. The boulder was enchanted so that Sisyphus was never able to complete the task: whenever he neared the top, the boulder always rolled back down—endlessly.

That's just a story, of course, but it's an impression we can sometimes relate to. We feel like we are pushing a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down, and sometimes it can even feel like it rolls right over us on its way down.

Like Sisyphus, some of us are also stuck in a discouraging cycle of expending a lot of effort with hardly any results to show for it, or getting stuck repeatedly in a difficult or unwholesome situation. But there is hope that we can break out of that cycle, and as believers, we have the extra power and strength of God to help us carry our burdens.

Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean God is going to magically solve all our problems. That's where faith comes in. With faith in God's ability to help with our burdens, we can grow and learn through the things that come our way, and come out victorious in the end.

The stories and articles in this issue of *Motivated* all attest that with faith we can reach the top of the hill, and that we will be able to move on eventually.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

FAITH DOES IT AGAIN!

By Iris Richard, adapted

For the past 30 years, faith has been a driving force in both my work and private life. I learned to trust that whatever the problem, there was always a ray of hope, and a light at the end of every tunnel. It played a major role when things seemed to go wrong, or when my plans and goals were dealt a severe blow.

When my second baby was born two months premature with underdeveloped lungs and a weak heartbeat, I was devastated. He spent the first month of his life in an incubator, and the doctors doubted his chances for a normal, healthy life. The fear of losing my baby almost choked me, but as I clung to faith, he and I both made it through the long wait before his release from the hospital with the necessary weight gain and a clean bill of health.

When, after working for 13 years in Southeast Asia, our assignment unexpectedly ended and our family, including three small children, was faced with starting all over again in a new land, faith gave us the courage and strength to wholeheartedly plunge into the unknown.

The loss of a child to leukemia after a two-year stretch of chemotherapy in 2003 brought me to the brink of despair. Faith accompanied me on the road of suffering and loss until I could arrive at a better place.

Feeling powerless to help a loved one's long struggle with drug addiction, and witnessing the resulting problems in his marriage and professional life, was heartbreaking. Faith gave me hope when all seemed hopeless, and strength to believe the battle could be won.

Over the 21 years (and counting) that I have been working on the African continent, with all its insecurity and poverty, faith has been my shield. It's given me courage and endurance to hang on during times when things don't make sense, or when energy and resolve wear thin.

Again and again, faith in God has made adverse circumstances manageable, happiness tangible, disappointments bearable, loss endurable, and given me the assurance that the sun will always shine again. ■

SURVIVING A DIFFICULT SITUATION

By Dina Ellens, adapted



Those first few minutes while the news sank in were devastating. I felt like my whole world was caving in. Somehow I managed to stumble shakily out of my boss' office. His words kept reverberating in my head: "Due to the current situation, we're having to cut back. So we wanted to ask if you wouldn't mind accepting a cutback on your work hours for now."

Perhaps you've faced that kind of situation, too. Whether you had full-time employment to support a family or, as in my case, a part-time job that was helping to supplement my income, either way, it's difficult news to swallow. What do you do? How do you pick up the pieces and go on?

Here's what worked in my case.

- 1. Reminding myself constantly to stay positive.** There was nothing I could do about my boss' decision, but I could decide how I was going to react to it. Each time I was tempted to start getting discouraged or depressed, I would yank myself back to positive ground. It wasn't easy, but I forced myself to keep at it.
- 2. Having sincere friends who listened sympathetically, heard me out, and supported me.** Having those friends helped me appreciate the fact that I had someone to go to in times like this. Some walls and distance had grown up between us due to my being so busy. These all

came down as I humbled myself and showed myself emotionally needy. As a result, we got closer through this experience.

- 3. Taking things one day at a time.** Instead of trying to figure out the whole future and where I was going from here, I tried to set myself one or two goals to accomplish each day. As I took care of those, I felt encouraged, knowing that I was taking care of some "to-dos" that I'd put off for a long time.
- 4. Counting my blessings more often and learning to see more clearly all the many ways that I was blessed.** Even very little things I'd taken for granted lifted my heart and lightened my step.

Day by day, as I put these tips into practice, things got better. Even though my circumstances didn't change, I cultivated a better outlook on my situation because of being more positive and grateful.

During the hours of work I still had, I continued to do the best I could, putting my whole heart into it, and I even got to do some things I'd never done before.

After about a month, I was given my full hours at work again. As you can imagine, I was very happy and relieved. But although my situation changed for the better, the tips I just shared are staying with me. If my circumstances change again—and I'm sure they will—I now have something solid to fall back on for those dark hours when my world seems to cave in. ■



PAPERCLIP FAITH

By Curtis Peter van Gorder

Did you ever hear about the young man named Kyle MacDonald who traded a paperclip for one item after the other until he was able to get his own house? Surprisingly, it only took him 14 trades to achieve his goal one year after he started. His journey was: clip to pen, to doorknob, to stove, to generator, to keg of beer, to snowmobile, to trip to Yahk, to panel truck, to recording contract, to one-year rent of an apartment in Phoenix, to an afternoon with Alice Cooper, to a motorized snow globe, to a speaking role in a movie, to a house in Kipling, Sk., Canada.

Kyle said, “I embarked on an adventure and that paperclip symbolically held it together. It was really easy to

remember.” In the same way as Kyle used the paperclip as a point of focus for his idea, I thought we could use his story by applying some of its concepts to our own lives.

Kyle was inspired by a childhood bartering game called, “Bigger and Better.” He wondered if it would be possible to take the idea of this game and bring it to life. Instead of playing with game pieces, he would trade real objects until he owned a house. Lots of the greatest discoveries and innovations in history were about making connections, applying one idea to another. Often, this involves connecting the imaginary with the real—first you have to conceive the idea before you can begin to reach for it.

What kept Kyle going throughout that year of trading from paperclip to house? One was the fun factor. Kyle said he was jazzed on his journey to get what he wanted; he loved every minute of it. Enjoying what we do, seeing it as a step to a greater end, helps greatly in seeing our vision come to fruition.

Kyle looked down on his desk and saw one red paperclip and thought he'd start his adventure with that. We have to begin with the little that we have before we can get to where we want to be. Kyle asked himself, *What is one red paperclip worth?* We should ask the same questions: *What is the potential of this idea? What can it lead to? What steps can I take to get closer to that goal?*

The red paperclip story is a lot about putting ideas into action. It is easy to just blow off an idea when we get it, dismissing it as insignificant, but once we take the time and find out it is what we should do, we should not give up while we are struggling to develop it. It is essential to stick to the plan till the end.

When we get an inspiration, it may be the first step into a new direction we should be going. Just as Kyle recognized his "Aha!" moment as a worthwhile idea, so can we. When inspiration strikes, we need to capture the lightning in a bottle for future use.

Kyle soon found that he was doing more than just trading objects; he was granting people their wishes. He was giving something to others that they could benefit from. He was connecting people who no longer needed something with someone who did.

In our dealings with others, we should look deeper than outward appearances

to find out what the person really needs. Achieving what you set out to do is more than acquiring wealth and objects; it is more about developing warm relationships with the people you meet along the way.

Near the end of his trading, Kyle got a year's rent of a house. Some people said he could stop then as he had a house, but he wasn't fully satisfied because it wasn't his own house, which is what he had set out to do.

Kyle's story is a good example of seeing the possibilities that others would miss. It makes me wonder what opportunities I've missed because of my lack of faith or vision, what waters I could have walked on, what mountains I could have moved, what rivers I could have crossed if I'd had more faith. Certainly, hearing stories like Kyle's gives us a precedent and example that the seemingly impossible is within our grasp.

Having faith for an idea that comes to fruition inspires others. Kyle remarked, "There are people all over the world that say they have paperclips clipped to the top of their computer, or on their desk, or on their shirt. It proves that anything is possible, and I think to a certain degree it's true." Kyle said the journey had turned out to be more exciting than the goal. "This is not the end. This may be the end of this segment of the story, but this story will go on," he said. He is now inspiring others as a motivational speaker, and has spoken to over 50,000 people on four continents. ■

To listen to Kyle's TED talk, visit
<http://ed.ted.com/on/98tt6x53>



THE SIGN

By Sharon Galambos, adapted

I must confess that I have never been one who could easily believe in miracles. In fact, I prided myself a bit on being “rational,” “logical,” of which skepticism was an integral part. Perhaps it was also because of feeling that what happens to us is just part of the big game plan—our destiny.

Health is something which is easy to take for granted, as long as we’re feeling fine. It’s not until something happens to us that we hit that reality check button, seemingly for the first time, no matter how many times we’ve had to hit that same button in the past.

At one point in my career, while working as a teacher in a low-income community, I had the fun experience of sharing living quarters in an attic with another teacher. It was great, except for the fact that we couldn’t straighten up in our quarters; we had to crouch and stoop to get around. I didn’t mind too much, since we mostly used the space for sleeping.

However, over time I began to notice pain and stiffness in my neck, like when one sleeps in a wrong position. That happens to everyone once in a while, but this was a pain that didn’t go away. Rather, it kept intensifying to the point

of becoming unbearable. X-rays showed nothing, but I knew there was something really wrong.

A friend suggested that I go to a chiropractor, who sent me to get a CAT scan. I still remember sitting face to face with him as he tried to gently explain that I had a herniated disc between two vertebrae of my neck, through which were passing some nerves. An abrupt movement could cause a severing of those nerves, leaving me paralyzed. One option was surgery to correct the damage and fit a bone patch from my hip onto my neck, immobilizing it and leaving me unable to turn my neck, with the further downside that surgery wasn’t a 100% bet for permanent success. The remaining option was experiencing excruciating pain and potential paralysis at any moment. I chose the surgery, which the head of the neurosurgery hospital himself agreed to perform.

Everything was ready and taking its logical course. The night before the surgery, my friends and colleagues gathered to pray for me. During the prayer, someone shared that they had the impression that I would heal completely without the surgery. Whoa, that definitely did not fall into the “logical course”



pattern! Needless to say, I spent a sleepless night, wrestling with this thought.

The amazing thing is that by the dawn's first rays I felt a peace I couldn't explain envelop my heart and mind. I now believed that I was going to be healed miraculously and naturally, and I called the hospital to let them know that I was cancelling my surgery. I got a call back from the surgeon, asking if the pain was causing me to have a mental breakdown. He was absolutely sure that I had gone off my rocker, especially when I could only answer that I believed I would heal naturally.

The next challenge I had to face was the pain. Up to this point I had been going for painkiller injections every six hours. If I believed I was going to get better, I should also believe the pain would cease, I thought. I didn't go for my next injection.

I was not instantly healed and delivered from pain, but gradually the pain did subside and little by little I was able to move my head and even turn it to both sides. The healing process continued until I was leading a normal life again.

Wait a minute! Normal? What if the condition was still present, just to a

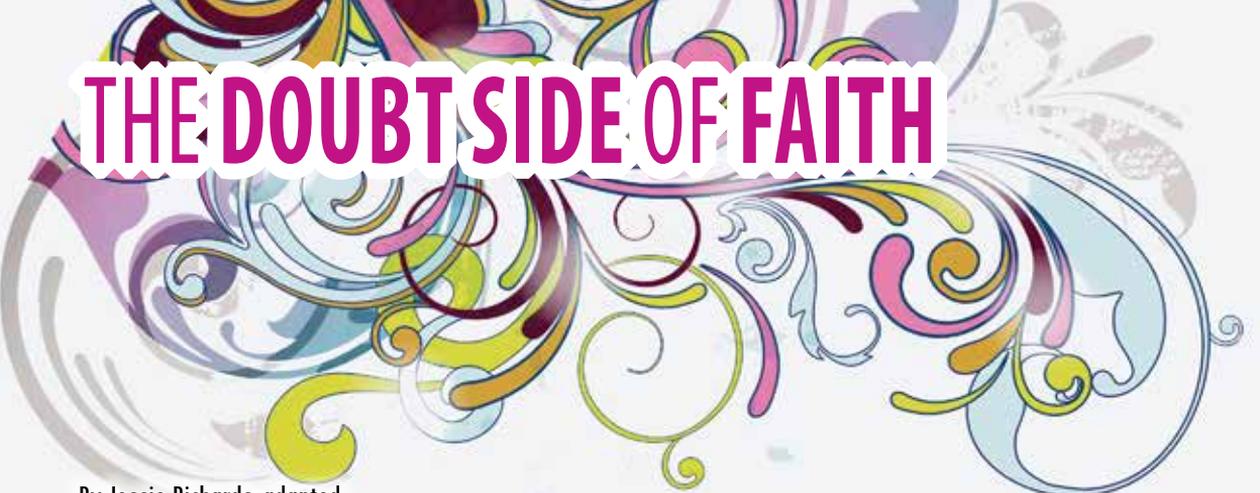
lesser extent, and if I jolted my neck, the nerves would snap? Those little doubts began to plague me, and I found myself being extra cautious in my movements.

Logic kicked in: another CAT scan should provide information either way. Lo and behold, the second CAT scan showed absolutely nothing, like there had never been any problem at all! Was that first CAT scan really me? I was in ecstasy!

The first person I wanted to show the scan to was the surgeon. I showed up at his office and placed the scan in front of him. With a playful smile, I asked, "What do you have to say about this?"

He studied it for a long time, then looked at me and replied, "You know I'm an atheist. From that point of view, my answer would be that this is a phenomenon that could possibly happen, though extremely rarely, perhaps once in a million times. However, from what my eyes are seeing, I have to concur that this is a miracle."

As for the final outcome, I have not had the surgery in the many years since, and every day when I move my head or stretch, I smile as I realize once again that I am living proof that miracles can happen. ■



THE DOUBT SIDE OF FAITH

By Jessie Richards, adapted

I grew up thinking that “faith” and “doubt” were opposites. Faith was good. Doubt was bad. With that mindset even questions could be dangerous, as I figured they could lead to doubt. For an intellectually curious person, that is a difficult thing to deal with, and I struggled with it for most of my life.

At one point, I had what seemed to me a revelation, and which I have since learned to be something many people of faith agree on: Doubt is not the enemy of faith, but can in fact make it stronger. Answers need questions as much as questions need answers.

The way I see it, when you are a person of faith and you question your faith, one of two things happens: either you lose faith—in which case it was probably not real or strong enough to begin with—or, you find that despite the inner struggles, despite the sadness, despite the unexplainable or unanswerable, your faith remains. The latter is what happened to me when I let myself explore my doubts.

I often find myself frustrated at the need many of us often have to make things “either/or” and to put everything in a box. We feel the need for a conclusive

answer. Right or wrong. Black or white. Faith or reason. Science or God. I think there are very few things in life that are so simple. I also think the whole point of faith is that it is something beyond our “boxes” and something we cannot be conclusive about.

In the end, what we are left with is a choice of faith. I choose to have faith, and that being connected to a Higher Power makes me a better human being. Wanting to be the best person I am capable of being is in itself enough reason for faith. My faith may not be “traditional,” and sometimes I miss that sense of simplistic confidence that I used to have. In its place, however, I have instead gained awareness, humility, and openness that I hope will never go away. I’m hungry to learn, because I know that there is so much I do not know.

I have found peace in knowing that I’ll never have all the answers, and that’s okay. That’s a part of faith. While I can’t say that my faith is stronger than before I started on my journey of doubt, I can say this: I have thrown every doubt at my faith, and my faith is still here. And that’s pure joy! ■

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

By Elsa Sichrovsky, adapted

I recently read C. S. Lewis' novel, *The Screwtape Letters**, which chronicles a fictional correspondence between a senior devil named Screwtape, and a junior devil named Wormwood. These letters include fascinating insight into Satan's strategies for sabotaging my spiritual growth, relationship with God, and interactions with others. One of the letters explores the ups and downs of the human experience, what I call the "peaks and valleys."

In this letter, the devils are discussing the period of "dryness and dullness" that Wormwood's charge is experiencing. Screwtape warns that God intends to use this time to strengthen the young man's faith and advises Wormwood to ensure that the young man does not become aware of the normalcy of valleys, but instead becomes convinced that his languid, depressed feelings are a permanent condition. As I read, I reflected on my personal peak-and-valley cycle, and what I have learned from my valleys.

I have certainly enjoyed "peaks" in my life: periods of success in my work, progress in my studies, friendships, health, and joyful relationships. But I have also experienced "valleys," such as the one I struggled through just

recently. It started with a major setback in my work, followed by problems in my studies, conflicts and strained communication with loved ones, and finally a bout of illness. I found myself at an all-time low, with no inspiration for anything.

My valley seemed to stretch on endlessly, swallowing me in its dark emptiness and blanketing me in despair. *What is happening? What have I done wrong?* I wondered desperately.

I tried to use willpower and effort to re-create the excitement and highs I had enjoyed during my peaks, but this only left me exhausted and more discouraged. It finally dawned on me that faith cannot be measured by feelings. Focusing on my changeable and often negative emotions only plunged me deeper into my doubts and made my trials more difficult to bear.

Reading *The Screwtape Letters* confirmed what I had discovered in my valley. My struggles were not indications that I had failed or that God had abandoned me. Rather, I realized that they are painful yet normal parts of our human experience. It felt as if I would remain in my misery forever, but I found that all valleys end in God's good time, and I emerged with renewed faith in His grace and love. ■

**The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis is a classic masterpiece that entertains readers with its sly and ironic portrayal of human life and foibles from the vantage point of Screwtape, a highly placed assistant to "Our Father Below." At once wildly comic, deadly serious, and strikingly original, C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* is the most engaging account of temptation—and triumph over it—ever written.

Finding faith

NOTABLE
QUOTES



Faith is a reasoning trust, a trust which reckons thoughtfully and confidently upon the trustworthiness of God.

—**John Stott**

God didn't promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, or sun without rain, but He did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.—**Unknown**

Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.—**Paul Tillich**

For many people in our world, the opposite of faith is doubt. The goal, then, within this understanding, is to eliminate doubt. But faith and doubt aren't opposites. Doubt is often a sign that your faith has a pulse, that it's alive and well and exploring and searching. Faith and doubt ... are, it turns out, excellent dance partners.—**Rob Bell**

For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it.—**John Ortberg**

Faith is believing in something when common sense tells you not to.

—**From the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street***

Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.

—**Frederick Buechner**

Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't there. You can't see the future, yet you know it will come; you can't see the air, yet you continue to breathe.

—**Claire London**

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

—**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light.

—**Helen Keller**

